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A theoretical model for the authentic assessment of teaching

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Over the course of the last decade, many higher education institutions that prepare teachers along with states, districts, and national organizations have sought to design new forms of assessment for preservice teachers. These efforts have stemmed from a growing sentiment that more powerful and nuanced assessment strategies are now needed to target the complexities of the knowledge that teachers bring to bear in their teaching (Shulman, 1987) as well as the subtleties of innovative teaching practice (Smith, 1990). Efforts to create new forms of assessment have sought to transcend the limits of traditional testing practices as they provide ways to sensitively document the personally and contextually complex world of teaching. This movement towards new forms of assessment for preservice teachers has been marked, generally speaking, by movement away from standardized paper and pencil tests of knowledge and skill and the use of observational checklists of teaching behaviors. These types of assessments are targeted by would be reformers as reflecting a narrow conception of teaching (Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Klein, 1995). As an alternative, we hear calls for more nuanced, “authentic” forms of assessment that can capture the complexities of teaching and learning as they develop over time and across different contexts (Shulman, 1988; Wolf, 1991).

The representation of assessment in the research literature has, in many ways reflected these trends. Calls for “authentic assessments” are now common, focusing on the need for assessors to gain access to the “context sensitive understandings of pedagogical and personal principles that underpin the work of teaching” (Tellez, 1996, p.704). Darling-Hammond (2000) characterizes authentic assessments as those that: 1) sample the actual knowledge, skills, and dispositions of teachers in

teaching and learning contexts; 2) require the integration of multiple types of knowledge and skill; 3) rely on multiple sources of evidence collected over time and in diverse contexts; and 4) are evaluated using codified professional standards. Wiggins (1989) particularly stresses the first two of these characteristics as criteria for authenticity: assessments need to reflect the intellectual work of practicing professionals, and they need to be characterized by active engagement, exploration, and inquiry on the part of the student. This notion of authenticity - that it is contextually rooted and rich with intellectual opportunity for the participant - closely parallels Newmann and Wehlage (1993) who claim that authentic assessments help students create “discourse, products, and performances, that have value or meaning beyond success in school” (p.8).

Despite the vigor behind many recent proposals to alter the tools we use to assess the knowledge and skills of preservice teachers, however, many “new” and “innovative” testing practices often seem to resemble “traditional” testing habits. This paper will argue that a deeply embedded culture of traditional testing habits has attenuated efforts to reform testing for preservice teachers and that a revitalized notion of “authenticity” in assessment is needed. What teacher educators and policymakers sometimes hold up as new is often saturated with the assumptions of traditional practice. For example, while “performance-based assessment” continues to gain support among teacher educators and policymakers, many uses of performance based assessment suggest competency-based models of testing; assessors focus on the frequency of certain teaching behaviors but lack the means to address the subtleties of the teacher’s decision-making processes. In many of these cases, the discrete behaviors assessed are identified

by process/product research which specifies a standardized set of criteria to be used as a common language to assess competent teaching (Kuligowski, Holdzkom, & French, 1993). These characteristics are more congruent with teacher competency testing than authentic forms of assessment, despite the use of a new label.

Any effort to create alternative forms of assessment needs to confront the largely entrenched culture of bureaucratic testing practices and its concomitant assumptions about teaching practice. One such assumption is that the teacher is the focal point of the all classroom activities - that the teacher controls the environment and chooses from a repertoire of "effective" behaviors to ensure an efficiently run classroom dynamic: "According to this model, good teachers ask certain types of questions (e.g. higher and lower order), provide wait time, display warmth and enthusiasm, and provide structure in the way of advance organizers, explicit transitions, and closure" (Wilson, 1995, p.191). Tests have typically reflected this model of teaching behavior by asking teachers to identify preferable teaching strategies without providing any contextual grounding. This feature of teacher testing led Darling-Hammond, Wise, and Klein (1995) to conclude, in fact, that the more knowledgeable teacher candidates are of the many contextual issues affecting teaching the more likely they are to have difficulty answering these types of items. Observational assessment systems may do no better than objective tests in being able to assess the complex range of teachers' knowledge and skill and address the ways teachers respond to multilayered contexts of their work.

Teacher testing has traditionally favored "bureaucratic" over "professional" approaches (Darling-Hammond, 1986). The bureaucratic view suggests that teachers need to be assessed with competency tests that are externally imposed, rule governed, and highly prescribed. This view seeks to ensure the development of professional habits by teachers that are supportive of the status quo. Closely tied to the "bureaucratic" model of teacher testing is teacher competency testing (Haney, Madaus, & Kreitzer, 1987), which is externally imposed and used primarily as a means to control entry into the profession by weeding out incompetent teachers lacking the necessary knowledge and skills. The "professional" model, by contrast, calls for forms of evaluation that reflect the complex decision-making processes that teachers engaged in in the course of their work and the myriad of ways that they modify their practices to address the diversity of their students and the social and institutional contours of their school and community. Seen in this way, situated within a culture of assessment that stresses competency testing and bureaucratic forms

of evaluation, many types of assessments that developers and users purport as "authentic" are, in fact, characterized by traditional, not authentic, testing habits. For example the use of teaching portfolios has been widely touted as an authentic practice because of the opportunity it offers for teachers to reflect on their work and its potential sensitivity to the complex context of the teacher's work. However, the portfolio might become an exhibition, a final product for the purposes of showmanship that stresses style over substance. Shulman (1998) calls this phenomena the "lamination" problem to suggest that treating the portfolio as a showpiece rather than an account of meaningful reflection over a period of time undermines its usefulness as an educative tool for its author. The mere use of a portfolio in this case in no way ensures that it represents an authentic assessment practice. The "lamination" problem may result, then, from the student trying to adhere to a set of externally prescribed standards that guide the form and content of the portfolio - standards borne out of the bureaucratic model of teacher testing.

Given these challenges, efforts to successfully enact authentic assessment for preservice teachers need to be rooted in a theoretical position that is robust enough to distinguish authentic assessment from its more traditional antecedents. This paper will explore Habermas' (1972, 1974) three knowledge constitutive interests - the technical, practical, and emancipatory - to help recognize characteristics of preservice teacher assessment and to help work towards an understanding of some of the differences between authentic and non-authentic forms of assessment. Each of the knowledge constitutive interests will be used to unpack the various ways that certain assessment practices might be understood and practiced.

Using the technical, practical, and emancipatory interests to understand educational practices has been used in other similar ways. Grundy (1982) and Carr and Kemmis (1986), for example, emphasize technical, practical, and emancipatory approaches to action research, and Zeichner and Liston (1987) and Valli (1992) use van Manen's (1977) closely corresponding technical, interpretive, and critical "level of reflectivity" to differentiate conceptions of reflection in teacher education. The section below describes my effort to apply the three knowledge constitutive interests to several assessment practices for preservice teachers. The purpose is to contribute to dialogue that shores up the theory behind authentic assessment and constructs more resilient forms of authentic assessment (in theory and in practice). In order for authentic assessment practices to be implemented in ways that are true to their underlying philosophy, and to avoid their misuse as more

bureaucratic testing, this type of inquiry should prove useful for educators and policymakers engaged in the reform of testing practices for teachers.

THE TECHNICAL, PRACTICAL, AND EMANCIPATORY INTERESTS

A widely used framework for analyzing curriculum practices is embedded in the philosophy of Habermas (1972, 1974) who proposes three knowledge-constitutive interests as the basis for how all knowledge is constructed. These interests, which he calls the “technical”, “practical”, and “emancipatory”, embody our sense of what constitutes knowledge as well as the categories we use to organize that knowledge (Grundy, 1987). Closely related to Habermas’s three knowledge constitutive interests is van Manen’s (1977) notion of three “levels of reflection”¹, the “technical”, “practical”, and “critical.”

The technical interest is a “fundamental interest in controlling the environment through rule following action based upon empirically grounded laws” (Grundy, 1987, p.12). Built on the precepts of the empirical-analytic scientific tradition, this interest is based on knowledge gained through precise scientific experimentation. The objectives-based model of curriculum design, perhaps best articulated by Tyler (1949), draws extensively from the technical interest. Simply put, the emphasis is on controlling student behavior and learning in such a way that they will conform to pre-determined ends. The focus is on the efficiency and effectiveness with which these objectives can be achieved, not with interrogating the value of the ends themselves. The technical interest is also characterized by scientifically generated laws to predict patterns of nature or human behavior. An important implication that the technical interest has for preservice teacher preparation is the emphasis it places on skill (Grundy, 1987). That is, teacher preparation is construed as “training” whereby teachers learn to implement a set of prescribed procedures and display certain behaviors claimed (by empirical science) to be representative of effective and efficient teaching.

The practical interest is “a fundamental interest in understanding the environment through interaction based upon a consensual interpretation of meaning” (Grundy, p.14). While the technical interest resides in prediction and control, the practical interest represents understanding. This type of understanding, however, is not based on making predictions and exerting control over the environment. Instead it entails an interest in taking the “right” action and asking questions such as “what ought I to do” (Grundy, p.13). While the technical interest draws from the empirical analytic

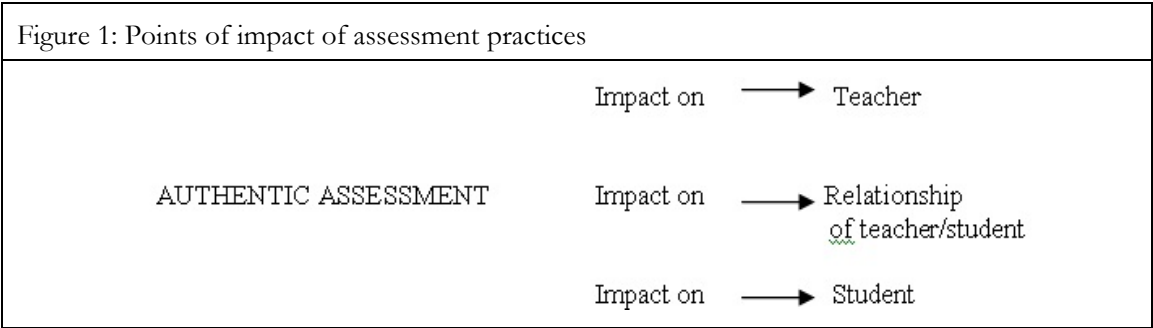
scientific tradition, suggested by its emphasis on generating law-like hypotheses, the practical interest draws from the historical-hermeneutic sciences. This is apparent in the practical interest’s association with interpretation and holistic understanding of action. The importance of skill in the technical interest is replaced by judgment and taste: “Taste...constitutes a special way of knowing. It belongs in the area of reflective judgment...Both taste and judgment are evaluations of the object in relation to the whole to see if it fits with everything else, whether, then, it is ‘fitting’” (Gadamer, 1979, p.36). The most salient lesson to be gleaned from the practical interest for preservice teacher education is the importance of thoughtful judgment and reflection on the part of the students by enabling them to bring forward their values and assumptions about themselves and about teaching. Furthermore student teachers guided by the practical interest might likely focus their action not on the material products their students create or on empirical validation of their achievement, but rather on the meaningfulness of the learning experiences for the students.

The emancipatory interest is “a fundamental interest in emancipation and empowerment to engage in autonomous action arising out of authentic, critical insights into the social construction of human society” (Grundy, p. 19). The emancipatory interest entails a concern for moral and ethical dimensions underlying human action by asking what sort of activities and experiences will help lead people towards lives characterized by equity, caring, and compassion (Gore & Zeichner, 1991). The emancipatory interest might guide a teacher toward recognizing the role that schools play in perpetuating social and political divisions and encourage that teacher to look for ways, both individually and collectively, to begin to challenge these problems. Habermas (1974) claims that emancipation inheres in the act of finding one’s voice which can only occur in conditions characterized by justice and equality. For the preservice teacher the emancipatory and practical interests are compatible with each other. Both imply a need for thoughtful judgment, freedom of speech and opportunity for reflection. However, the emancipatory interest also includes social and political critique. As teachers become aware of how they and their students exist within a social order characterized by the unequal distribution of power and privileges, and begin to question these arrangements as socially constructed and in need of change, they are expressing an emancipatory interest.

METHODOLOGY

The most common characteristics apparent in the existing literature on authentic assessment suggest the importance of both teacher control over their assessment experience and context sensitivity of the instrument. Accordingly, the operational definition that I begin with holds that “authentic assessments” 1) give students significant control over how they will be assessed and control over the conditions and context of their assessment and 2) are conducted within the context of student’s work, including their perception of roles, experiences, and practices (Tellez, 1996). The analysis uses the technical, practical, and emancipatory interests to strengthen authentic assessment with more conceptual clarity and add several new layers to this

meaning. These layers lie at the various “points of impact” of the authentic assessment experience (Figure 1). That is, the experience of an authentic assessment has implications not only for the assessee (student) but also for the assessor (teacher) and for the nature of the relationship between the student and teacher. The unique ways that assessment can affect the student, the teacher, and the relationship between the two was analyzed. Then a judgment was made about whether that knowledge interest is compatible with the concept of authentic assessment (as defined above). If it was found to be consistent, any new dimensions that the interest contribute to the concept of authentic assessment were identified.



FINDINGS

The impact on the student² can be interpreted in three ways, each way corresponding to one of the three knowledge interests. The same is true for the impact on the teacher and on the nature of the relationship (see Table 1). “Technical” appropriation of authentic assessment has three implications: 1) the student’s reflection is limited to technical decision-making; 2) the impact on the teacher(s) is minimal leading to little or no self-interrogation or collaborative inquiry into teaching practices; 3) the nature of the relationship is monologic where the teacher(s) or a set of standards authoritatively dictates expectation to the student. “Practical” appropriation of authentic assessment implies that: 1) the student’s reflection is characterized by “deliberative” or “personalistic” reflection (Valli, 1992) where the student reflects using personal perspectives and theories to reflect on his/her voice, personal growth, or professional relations; 2) The assessment experience enables the teacher(s) to interrogate their own practice and the question the educational goals they are pursuing through their decisions about instruction and assessment. 3) The nature of the relationship is “dialogic” where students and their evaluators enter into dialogue aimed at

understanding (Gitlin & Smyth, 1989); Finally the “emancipatory” appropriation of authentic assessment implies that 1) students begin to think critically about their teaching, making observations and judgments about the social and political contexts of their work; 2) The teacher(s) use the assessment experience to challenge the material and institutional structures of their work; and 3) The nature of the relationship is dialogic where students and teachers not only enter into dialogue aimed at understanding but also begin to alter the traditional power hierarchy that separates teacher and student.

Use of the three knowledge interests in this way serves two purposes. First, this framework suggests a renewed concept of authentic assessment, one which touches not only on the impact of the assessment experience on the student, but the impact of the experience on the assessor and the nature of the relationship between the assessor and the assessed. Put this way, authentic assessment can now be seen as characterized by five criteria:

- 1) They give students significant control over how they will be assessed and control over the conditions and context of their assessment
- 2) They are conducted within the context of student’s work, including their perception of roles, experiences,

and practices.

3) They provide for “deliberative” or “personalistic” or “critical” reflection (Valli, 1992) where the student reflects using personal perspectives and theories to reflect on his/her voice, personal growth, professional relations or the social and political context of his/her

work.

4) They enable the assessors to interrogate their own practice and to question the educational goals they are pursuing through their decisions about instruction and assessment or to challenge the institutional and bureaucratic structures of their work.

Figure 2: Assessment practices for preservice teachers within the technical, practical, and emancipatory interests			
	Assessment Practices for Preservice Teachers		
	Impact on student	Impact on teacher	Impact on relationship
Technical	technical decision-making	little or no self-interrogation	monologic
Practical	deliberative and personalistic reflection	interrogation of goals and practices	dialogic (aimed at understanding)
Emancipatory	critical reflection	interrogation of material and institutional structures	dialogic (aimed at understanding and confronting power hierarchy)

5) The nature of the relationship between assessor and assessed is “dialogic” where students and their evaluators enter into dialogue aimed at understanding and may use this dialogue as a basis to alter the traditional power hierarchy between them.

The unique ways in which the three interests are “at work” within models of performance-based assessment (including portfolios, and observations of teaching) and uses of action research in preservice teacher education are detailed in the next section. The intention is to give a holistic analysis of the relationship between the three interests and assessment practices, drawing from specific examples of these practices (and the experiences of both students and faculty involved in their development and implementation) where instructive. The discussion is divided into three sections, with each section corresponding to one of the three knowledge interests. Within each section, the knowledge interest is used to analyze the impact of assessment practices on the student, the teacher, and relationship between the two. Each section will conclude with brief analysis of the congruence between the three interests and authentic assessment. Following this discussion, overall implications are considered for teacher educator and policymakers who seek to construct and use authentic

assessment practices.

Assessment as technical

As indicated, the technical interest is based on the belief that all action needs to be geared towards the efficient fulfillment of predetermined ends. The interrogation of the worth or value of these ends would clearly not be an expected goal for a prospective teacher engaged in a “technical” form of assessment. Instead, the teacher might be expected to choose or construct answers or demonstrate performances that adhere as closely as possible to a set of standards. Furthermore given the technical interest’s grounding in empirical science as the basis for determining the ends (standards) to which action ought to lead, the students will have no role (or a very minimal role) in determining the criteria on which they will be judged. These decisions are left up to the judgment of experts who have determined a set of criteria for effective teachers to emulate.

Assessment guided by the “technical” places very similar limitations on teacher’s ability to interrogate his/her own practice. Both the role of the student *and* the role of the teacher become formed in a very mechanistic way which prevents either party from challenging the form of the evaluation or the conceptions of teaching it

embodies. The “control” of the teacher who uses evaluative tools to make judgments about a teacher candidate’s knowledge and skill - judgments on which real rewards and sanctions are based - may be, in fact, quite superficial. Teachers who implement assessments developed without their input function as bureaucrats who are asked only to determine how student performance matches a “correct” set of prescribed standards. This model of assessment does not assist the teacher in developing any kind of sensitivity for how the context of his/her work promotes, or hinders, worthwhile assessment experiences for the student. Nor does this model help guide the teacher toward exploring his/her own notions about teaching and learning or the value of teaching students the knowledge and skills embedded in the assessment. The type of inquiry, then, available to teachers is technical reasoning (Grundy, 1987) which need not be substantively different from the inquiry of, for example, an agriculturist:

The classical (technical) experimental approach to evaluation treats the problem of evaluating essentially the same as an experiment in agriculture or botany. An educationist measures success just as an agriculturist might test the efficiency of a new fertilizer (Lawton, 1980, p.112).

Technical interaction between the teacher and student is dominated by monologue on the part of the teacher. The communication is largely one-way with the categories used for discussion and the length and the structure of the discussion itself completely outside of the student’s control. Even occasions that provide for the student to take an active role in the discussion may still be monologic if the topics open for discussion have been prescribed for the student. In this sense, the monologue can be understood on a literal level: the teacher is doing all of the talking. It can also be understood more broadly: the student is “guided” by a set of standards that speak authoritatively to both student and teacher and shape the substance and nature of their interaction.

Using the first two criteria for authentic assessment - that students have control over the content and context of their assessment and that the assessment is conducted in the context of student’ work - reveals that neither condition is satisfied by the technical interest. Decisions regarding the types of evidence that will count towards proving the students teaching proficiency and the ways the student is expected to assemble or demonstrate these proficiencies are not made by the student. Rather they are made by the student’s faculty, by the state, by educational researchers or by professional associations that create the standards for the knowledge and skills

that beginning teachers are expected to demonstrate. The technical interest appears, for these reasons, incompatible with the concept of authentic assessment.

Assessment as practical

A significant difference between the technical and practical interests is that while the technical points the individual towards the efficient achievement of predetermined ends, the practical invites exploration of the worth and value of those ends. For the student, this shift from efficient action to judgment represents an opportunity to reflect on his/her teaching in more profound ways. The type of reflection used by teachers engaged in “practical” forms of assessment can be seen as “deliberative” and “personalistic” (Valli, 1992). Deliberative reflection is characterized by the student considering different notions of practice and using judgment to choose among various perspectives and theories. The relevance of these perspectives and theories may likely change for the student as he/she encounters new teaching contexts and types of students. Deliberative reflection, then, is responsive to the fluid contexts the student finds in the world of teaching. Deliberative reflection also encompasses the notion of reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983) - the type of reflection that is triggered when an individual thinks in action - using previous knowledge to address a particular situation in the moment he/she encounters it. In this case, as well, the contextual features of the student’s work as well as the craft knowledge derived from his/her own practice become important sources for his/her reflection. “Personalistic” reflection is characterized by the students using themselves - their voice, growth, and professional relations (Valli, p. 219) - as issues of concern. Assessment experiences that encourage students to explore their own biography, their own values, and their burgeoning theories about leaning and teaching encourage this type of personalistic reflection. A significant difference, therefore, between the practical and the technical interest is the process and the content of the reflection that the student might be able to engage in.

The practical interest invites teachers to act either individually or collectively to ask “What educational experiences are of the most worth?”. In this sense they are able to function not as technicians implementing a plan created elsewhere, but as architects of new, promising educational experiences for themselves and for their students. Assessments characterized by the practical interest are those experiences that prompt teachers to revisit their practice in this way.

While the relationship between student and teacher within the technical is monologic - characterized by authoritatively prescribed standards, the “practical”

relationship is dialogic. This implies the two parties enter into dialogue based on the mutual pursuit of understanding. A dialogic relationship cannot be determined by the extent of the discussion belonging to one party or the other. Instead it is based on a shared sense of commitment and flexibility on the part of all participants. A successful dialogical relationship happens when

the person with understanding does not know and judge as one who stands apart unaffected, but as one united by the specific bond with the other, he/she thinks with the other and undergoes the situation with him/her (Gadamer, 1979, p.288).

The aim of the dialogic relationship in the course of the assessment process is for the student and teacher to work together to reveal the student's strengths and needs and, together, construct more refined insights into the teaching and learning process.

The practical interest appears to be more compatible with the concept of authentic assessment than the technical interest. When students have more significant control over the conditions and contexts of their assessment they are vastly more likely to reflect on the deeper levels suggested above. Also, the second condition - that authentic assessment is conducted in the context of students' work, including their perceptions of roles, experiences, and practices - is directly tied to the nature of the experience of a student pursuing a holistic interpretation of meaning. Use of the practical interest as a backdrop for authentic assessment also suggests three new principles underlying authentic assessment. Each of these new principles corresponds to one of the "points of impact" of assessment practice - the student, the teacher, and the relationship between the two. These new principles are:

- They provide for "deliberative" or "personalistic" reflection where the student reflects using personal perspectives and theories to reflect on his/her voice, personal growth and professional relations
- They enable the assessors to interrogate their own practice and to question the educational goals they are pursuing through their decisions about instruction and assessment
- The relationship between the assessor and the assessed is "dialogic" where students and their evaluators enter into dialogue aimed at shared understanding

Some assessment practices could clearly be characterized by some of these features, but not all. The effort here is not to specify at what point an assessment practice

contains enough of these stated conditions to warrant its designation as "authentic". Instead the effort is to use practical interest (along with the technical and emancipatory) to enrich the ways can speak about authentic assessment so as to make possible new and varied forms of authentic assessment and to help sharpen the theoretical distinctions between authentic assessment and traditional testing practice.

Assessment as emancipatory

The emancipatory interest represents a concern with the moral and ethical criteria surrounding human action. Guided in emancipatory ways might lead an individual not only to make judgments about the educational value in certain practices, but also to place these practices within a social a political context. This step may help reveal unjust or inequitable practices at work that serve to privilege certain groups and marginalize others. The particular roles that schools may play in perpetuating unjust social arrangements and that teachers and students ought to play in opposing these roles and creating more fair and equitable arrangements and practices are both brought into focus by the emancipatory interest. In terms of assessment practices for preservice teachers, one might ask: What types of assessment practices will help lead toward "forms of life which are mediated by concerns for justice, equity, and concrete fulfillment and (how can these practices) serve important human needs and satisfy important human purposes?" (Zeichner & Liston, 1987, p. 25).

The teacher who participates in assessment practices framed by the emancipatory interest will also look towards issues of equity and social justice. The focus of his/her efforts might be the internal dynamics of the classroom where, among teacher education students, power and privilege are distributed inequitably. Or, his/her efforts may be focused on patterns of inequity in the institution of which he/she is associated or , even, on more global patterns of social, economic, or political disparity in the culture that surrounds the school. All of these concerns are consistent with the emancipatory interest.

Teachers guided by the emancipatory interest will take active steps to make their own interactions with students reflect emancipatory tenets. The nature of this interaction shares several features of the dialogical relationship that marks the "practical" interaction of teacher and student. That is, discarding authoritarian discourse where the student is "lectured to" by either a teacher or a set of standards, both types of relationships are aimed at joining the teacher and student in collaborative efforts at understanding. What marks the emancipatory relationship as different from the practical is the content of that understanding and the importance

of guiding students toward emancipatory questioning without denying them the authority to choose the terms of their own inquiry.

The emancipatory interest is also compatible with authentic assessment. In order to empower students in ways congruent with an emancipatory intent, students will need to have a significant amount control over how they are assessed and the conditions and context of the assessment. The emancipatory interest is also reflected in the second condition - authentic assessment is conducted in the context of student's work, including their perceptions of roles, experiences, and practices. As students investigate the social and political dimensions of their practice, they are exploring the "context of their work" through a new lens characterized by an emancipatory focus.

In addition using the emancipatory interest to broaden notions of authentic assessment suggests three new features, also corresponding to the role of the student, the teacher, and the relationship between the two. These new features are:

1. They provide for critical reflection where the student reflects on the social and political context of his/her work
2. They enable assessors to interrogate their own practice and to challenge the institutional and bureaucratic structures of their work
3. The nature of the relationship between the teacher and student is dialogic, used as a basis to alter the traditional power hierarchy between them.

It should be noted also that the new features above exist in addition to, not in place of, the new features suggested by the practical interest. The reason is that the practical and emancipatory interests are theoretically compatible with each other. So, for example, a dialogic relationship based on power sharing (emancipatory) is also premised on the participants entering into dialogue aimed at understanding (practical).

Conclusion: Implications for teacher educators and policymakers

The assessment of teachers has traditionally been cast in the model of bureaucratic testing. The model of a test as something that is done to teachers within a context over which they have little control is widespread and deeply embedded in the culture of educational practice. More authentic forms of assessment represent a promising development. However, the history of technical testing militates heavily against wholesale enactment of more authentic assessment practices. Definitions of authentic assessment and justifications for their use are still "works in progress", are not always able to counter the effects of a culture of bureaucratic testing, and may themselves become stuck in technical forms of implementation. To help counter this phenomenon, I have articulated a revitalized conception of authentic assessment. This conception derives from use of the three knowledge constitutive interests to flesh out a broader notion of authentic assessment (see Table 2 for a summary of the five features of authentic assessment).

Table 2: Summary of revitalized conception of authentic assessment

- 1) They give students significant control over how they will be assessed and control over the conditions and context of their assessment
- 2) They are conducted within the context of student's work, including their perception of roles, experiences, and practices.
- 3) They provide for "deliberative" or "personalistic" or "critical" reflection (Valli, 1992) where the student reflects using personal perspectives and theories to reflect on his/her voice, personal growth, professional relations or the social and political context of his/her work.
- 4) They enable the assessors to interrogate their own practice and to question the educational goals they are pursuing through their decisions about instruction and assessment or to challenge the institutional and bureaucratic structures of their work.
- 5) The nature of the relationship between assessor and assessed is "dialogic" where students and their evaluators enter into dialogue aimed at understanding and may use this dialogue as a basis to alter the traditional power hierarchy between them.

The intention of this argument has not been to characterize any particular assessment practice as authentic or non-authentic. Any type of assessment can be used in technical, practical, and emancipatory ways. The label affixed to any practice tells very little about the ways it is used: you can't judge an assessment by its cover. This paper, rather, seeks to generate discussion among teacher educators and policymakers about the possibilities for authenticity that inhere in many types of assessment practices and the conditions that need to be put in place to ensure that authentic assessments retain their theoretical integrity when implemented in practice.

This is not meant to imply, however, that authentic assessments are the only valuable forms of assessment that teacher educators and policymakers should pursue. In fact, authentic assessment represents just one of a variety of instruments that should be used to assess teachers. Shulman (1988) argues for a "union of insufficiencies" - that is, that pursued in isolation, one type of assessment measure is inadequate. Instead he argues for a process that extends over time and includes "written tests of knowledge, documentation of accomplishments, analyses of performances, attestations by supervisors" (p. 38). There are, circumstances, for example, that may call for technical forms of testing. For example, as portfolios become increasingly used by districts and states to make licensing and credential decisions for prospective teachers, it may be beneficial (or necessary) for teachers to present a "showpiece" portfolio of their best work that documents as unambiguously as possible their ability to meet certain licensure standards. Teacher educators might, in this case, want to consider having students develop two portfolios - one that meets the criteria for authenticity and promotes their reflective judgment and one that showcases the best of their work (see Snyder, Lippincott, & Bower, 1998).

Treating the three knowledge interests as a hierarchy where assessment on the practical and emancipatory levels is always seen as preferential to assessment on the technical level may misrepresent the iterative nature of the three interests. Preservice teachers need to develop technical competence in teaching skill though that should not be all that they develop. However, if students are exposed to authentic assessments practices that presume a level of technical competence that they might not yet have developed, then their effectiveness in the classroom might be seriously compromised. It seems that a variety of assessment practices are needed, including, but not limited to, authentic assessment to help ensure that, by the time they finish their teacher preparation program, students' repertoire includes technical expertise, practical judgment, and social and political consciousness.

Notes

1. I borrow the word "level" with a sense of caution. The three knowledge constitutive interests or "levels" may easily be construed as a hierarchical relationship, implying that one naturally transcends, or ought to transcend from a "lower" level (i.e. technical) to a "higher" level (i.e. emancipatory). I agree, however, with Noddings (1986) and Gore and Zeichner (1991) that such a position diminishes the possible value of technical skill and may be unresponsive to the needs of preservice teachers. These points are taken up again in the last section of this paper.

2. In the ensuing discussion, the term "student" and "assessee" will be used synonymously to refer to the preservice teacher education student. "Teacher" and "assessor" will be used synonymously to refer to the teacher education faculty and/or other supervisory personnel such as university supervisors.

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